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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the problems of racism, prejudice, and bigotry and how they restrain academic achievement in minority students and the need for leadership to confront and reverse these effects. Politics (suburban/urban differences in funding), technology (computer gap), and family income are three factors that impact differentially upon the nature of prejudice as experienced in today's schools. A strategy is presented for dealing with prejudice in the classroom and school life that takes into account these larger social factors. The various stages of this strategy are examined starting with the need for an analysis of the situation, acceptance by the school community of the data once it reaches the public, creation of a strategic plan of action based on this data, coordination of a response, and the institutionalization of that response. The issues of racism and prejudice have never been greater and that the school, which is a powerful factor for realigning social forces in the community, needs to be a place where ideas of social, ethnic, and racial integration can be realized. An appendix lists sample goals of a strategic plan. (Contains 27 references.) (GLR)

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ED 374 181

LEADERS FOR TOMORROW--TODAY:

CONFRONTING PREJUDICE IN SCHOOLS

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"Admitting of a future that is unlike the past."

Introduction

The college Class of 2009 is currently enjoying the rewards of the first grade. It is unlikely that many non-white students in this first grade class will reach their educational potential. The debilitating effects of racism, prejudice, and bigotry will take their toll on non-white students with a greater vengeance than upon other student groups. This need not be the case if schools, guided by the vision of their leadership, confront prejudice as experienced with the school community by students, teachers, and parents.

The urgency of this issue is increased by the growing proportion of non-white students in today's schools, and by the lack of educational programs appropriate to their talents. This last observation is most dramatically described in the national report on gifted education which highlights the differential impact of gifted education on minority students (National Excellence, 1993). In addition, projections indicate that by 2010 one-third of America will be composed of African American and Hispanics; and the student-age population of minority students will increase from 20% to 39% from 1985 to 2020 (Green, 1989). We need not wait until the Class of 2009 reaches college to see the full impact of these enrollment trends. According to data released from the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, currently up to 70% of the nation's African American and Hispanic

students are studying in classrooms with predominantly minority enrollments (Manzo, 1993).

More than 3,000 youngsters will drop out of school today and every day for the rest of the school year, until about 600,000 are lost by June--in many urban schools, this represents perhaps half the enrollment (Barber, 1993). Not surprisingly a lot of the dropouts will end up in prison rather than college--especially if they are young black males: one in four will pass through the correctional system, and at least two out of three of those will be dropouts.

Schools, while not the sole factor impacting on student attrition, plays a critical role in developing and enhancing the social capital of all students, thus allowing more students to succeed (Clark, 1983; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Velez,1989).

Linking such efforts with the community environment and families allows for the possibility of academic success which appears elusive for any one component of a students life separate from the other two (McGraw, 1992; Ogbu, 1988). Leading the way within this dynamic triangle of school-community-family relationships must be the school for this is the one place with the vision and resources needed to confront prejudice today.

The Leadership Challenge: A Moral Re-commitment

In detailing the daunting challenge to contemporary leaders, Warren Bennis (1989) describes a very real situation regarding the entrenched bureaucracy that is part of every organization.

The impact of this force is to discourage the emergence of effective leaders and works to undermine their best efforts. Historically the role of school Principal has suffered a similar fate (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Couple these entrenched attitudes with issues of racial sensibility and multicultural education, and the task of leadership is most daunting for today's Principals and Superintendents.

If there is one point of consensus in the recent debate over school change and transformation it is this: the Principal is the key agent for change, regardless of metaphor or model of school change utilized (English, 1994; McLaughlin, 1990).

School leadership which enhances racial understanding and a shared vision for social integration must be a moral commitment at the center of every school leader or else such a goal will be pushed aside in light of other pressing issues. Unless such a value towards integration is part of the "covenant of shared values" (Sergiovanni, 1992) then school leaders will have failed in their primary responsibility to build a <u>school community</u> of learners seeking "the truth" as discovered in dialogue and a quest for knowledge rather than merely a <u>bureaucratic learning organization</u>.

There will always be great peril in an educational vision which seeks to move schools past the economic model of providing training grounds for the corporate establishment and for economic competition. Education for living with cultural and social

diversity must be for more than economic gain. Yes, there is a moral commitment to developing, accepting, and celebrating the racial and cultural characteristics of the Class of 2009.

This moral commitment is exactly what is required if we are to truly respond to the "quiet crisis" which will take a significant toll on the economically disadvantaged and minority students. If this is one of the major conclusions of the authors of the report on the needs of Gifted Education today (National Excellence , 1993) how much more significant will this impact be upon the average and below average minority student. Where is their "national report", who is describing their "crisis"-quiet or otherwise?

Robert Bellah (1985) and his coauthors warned us that it has taken a "strenuous effort" to get to the place that the authors of National Excellence describe. The "quiet crisis" did not just happen. As the data from the Harvard Project on School Desegregation points out we have "particularized" the educational worlds of our children to the point that we must start anew to re-claim the high expectations and educational standards appropriate for all children. The authors of National Excellence document well the failure of our efforts to reach appropriate levels of achievement at all levels of schooling--especially for the most talented minority students in our midst.

I would like to extend the report's analysis further on behalf of the economically disadvantaged and minority students

often spoken of in the report. In doing so, I hope to underscore the urgency of the educational tinderbox represented by unequal attention to the those traditionally over-looked in education, and make loud the "quiet crisis" which all of our children face today. In confronting this crisis today, the educational leaders of the present will ensure more racially and culturally responsive schools for tomorrow's leaders: the Class of 2009.

The Urgency of the Quiet Crisis:

Politics, technology, and family income are three critical factors impacting differentially upon the nature of prejudice experienced within schools today. These three factors form the larger frame of reference within the school community for highlighting the urgency with which prejudice is experienced. These factors impact on parents, students, and teachers. They must be taken into account by the leadership of a school if racial and cultural understanding is to be fully realized by all members of the school community.

A. The Urban Landscape: The large urban cities which are home to the most seriously economically disadvantaged, are politically dependent upon their suburban neighbors.

To re-dedicate and re-envision this commitment to the economically disadvantaged and minority student will not be easy in these communities. The forces at play are significant: racism and money. The blight upon urban schools is well documented in the evening news and the daily paper; the under-achievement of

suburban schools is the constant complaint of local school boards. For both sectors the reality of funding educational systems which can no longer be funded from a shrinking tax basis is testing legislators across the nation.

This point is dramatically underscored by Cornel West (1993) when he notes that 86% of white suburban Americans live in neighborhoods that are less than 1% Black. Hence, the educational prospects for the country--especially cities--depends largely on the moral stance of a suburban electorate, and the political will of urban educators. We have never experienced such a mix of leadership conflict in our history.

Locally in New York State, this battle has historically been between up-state and down-state. Similar boundary lines are found in all parts of the country. The net result is the un-equal funding of educational costs. The disparity in per-capita spending is an educational given. Only recently have the federal courts explored ways to intervened and re-establish equity of educational funding. The battle lines are drawn, and elections are won and lost (NJ Governor Jim Florio lost in large part due to his efforts in this regard). The crisis here is two-fold: can leaders (and their members) in regional and national education groups set both, a fast paced leadership response the to this funding crisis, and not choose sides in the political arena?

B. The Technology Gap: Computers have radically changed the world of knowledge, and the literacy involved in computer usage

will be critical to the achievement of the members of the Class of 2009. "Computer literacy is now as important as the ability to read or write" argue the authors of a report written in 1988, "Planning for Microcomputers in Higher Education" (Ferrante, et.al.) . Furthermore, a Brookings Institution study describes computer literacy in schools as "a modern indicator of school quality" (Boozer, 1992). The access/usage gap of computers between rich and poor, black and white is significant. Terese Kreuzer, studying computer resources at the university level noted, "...it is clear that a significant gap in both quality and quantity of computer access exists for black students as opposed to whites ...without computers no educational institution can properly prepare its students to compete in modern society " (1993).

While computers cannot ensure student achievement, such technology offers access to new knowledge, new discoveries, and operates as an arena to creativity across many talent domains. Hence, education of the economically disadvantaged will suffer even more in the future if such resources are not available in their schools.

C. Family Income: Economically disadvantaged students will also suffer from their inability to fund higher education when the Class of 2009 starts down the road to higher education. What factors will impact between now and the Fall of 2006, when they enter college, to shift the following situation reported by the

editors of The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (Autumn, 1993, p.14): "median black family incomes in the United States are less than 60 percent of those of whites--almost precisely the ratio at which they stood 25 years ago. Black families today are three times as often in poverty as are whites--again no change since the mid-1960's". We know the income boost attached to formal education--even though it impacts Blacks less significantly than whites (Hacker, 1992; New York Times, 1993). Our failure to respond and nurture the talent of the economically disadvantaged and minority students today will ensure the continued crisis of urban America well beyond the next century. Indeed, we will have failed to secure the growth of the many talented leaders of the Class of 2009.

Strategies for School Leaders

A major challenge for school leaders will be to create a learning environment in which the diversity brought to the classroom is valued and utilized as a rich resource, and where each student is enabled to develop his/her potential maximally. There will be a greater need than ever before for teachers to develop the requisite attitude and skills which will enable them to share with young people ways of acknowledging their own cultural backgrounds and respecting others from diverse cultural backgrounds.

There are research-based theories of learning which educational leaders can draw upon (Nieto, 1992; Wang, Haertel &

Walberg, 1993) to enhance their instructional effectiveness in dealing with the classroom environment and the impact of racism.

Prior to the classroom level of intervention there is the need for the faculty and student body to come to terms with their own experience of prejudice in the culture of the school as well as within the instructional framework of the classroom. As discussed in the previous section, larger social factors will impact upon the life in the classroom. The social inter-relationships of faculty to faculty, student to student, and faculty to student are critical relationships in determining the quality of the racial ethos and support students experience within school settings, and these do not exist far removed from the social factors described above (Allen & Haniff, 1991; Davis, 1991; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

The following strategy for dealing with prejudice experienced in classroom and school life takes into account the larger social factors already presented. It should be noted that in dealing with prejudice, such an assumption will have to be tested first, and explored with the context of each school in order for the intervention to be valid and responsive to the specific needs of each school community. Not all groups experience racism in the same manner (Essed, 1991). Thus interventions may take on different intensities and modes depending upon the specific composition of the local school community.

A Plan for Action:

Stage 1: Needs Analysis: One of the first tasks required of the school leader in confronting issues of racism and prejudice within the school community deals with the "making real" the prejudice experienced by students, staff, and faculty. The data for this needs analysis can come from many sources, and it ought to be as inclusive as possible, representing each of the constituent groups within the school community.

The data may come from a focus group which has been assembled to explore experiences of racism across various groupings: students, parents, faculty, and staff. The data may come in the form of narrative stories or anecdotes recorded by people, and written in an anonymous collection. Narratives from each constituent group would be essential to assist in identifying the pervasiveness of racial and cultural hostility present. Lastly, the more empirical the base of such data the harder to deny or debunk the experience of racism in the school community. Hence, data which shows, based upon the school population, differential patterns in student achievement would be critical in establishing the validity of the needs analysis. The essential task at this stage is to gather data both on the "culture of the school" and the empirical experiences related to student assessment, faculty hiring, or institutional polices impacting on racial or cultural perceptions (ie., admissions test, placement records, role or effect of tracking on varied

student groups, selection (self or otherwise) of curriculum by differential student groups, etc.).

The initial impulse for the needs analysis stage must come from the school leader or else the process may be open to political sabotage or posturing in such a way as to place all parties in a defensive rather than a proactive stance.

Once the data is collected, it must be communicated to the larger school community in a forum which allows for discussion, understanding, ownership, and the formulating of a strategic plan for corrective action.

The strategic plan should have a 3 to 5 year time horizon. Re-envisioning relationships within the school ethos around issues of race and prejudice will not happen quickly, and no one should be seeking a quick fix or a series of workshops which allows them the false presumption that they have done all that is required to address the issue. In addition, establishing a long-term view towards these issue legitimizes attending to them on a regular basis, in a manner similar to the revision of curriculum or the demands of on-going professional development for teachers.

Once the school community comes to accept that working on issues of prejudice is a long-term process, one which will have success and difficult moments, then all constituent groups within the school community are in a position to assume responsibility for the success of this effort. The need for a scapegoat to blame for the short-term failure while be greatly ameliorated. This

need will never disappear, since in the short term the process will prove difficult, and when it appears most stressful to the institution, people will seek to attach this pain to some "one" person. The critical role of the school leader at these "flash points of pain and flight" will be to re-envision for the school community the original ideals governing their foray into this area of personal and institutional self-reflection. Hence, the greater the data accumulated from all constituents, and the stronger the empirical basis for such data, the greater the odds are that the school leader will be able to re-envision the original ideals of the school community. This leads directly into the next stage.

It should be noted that each of the constituent groups will have its own individualized needs which will require specific actions, as well as there being a more corporate response to specific needs. For example, teachers will have a need to examine their instructional style for evidence of prejudice or bias while parents will be required to observe home norms or attitudes expressed within the family structure for evidence of bias. Students, of course, will have to examine both contexts for their understanding of their experiences of prejudice.

Stage 2: Accepting the Data: Once the data from the needs analysis is public, and thoroughly discussed among the various constituents with the school community, then the data must be accepted or "owned" by the school community. Such ownership will

enhance the ability of the community to formulate realistic plans for addressing the needs described by the data.

School leadership at this stage might take on various forms: a) coordinated meetings with parents, faculty, and students to review the data, with a goal towards developing a long-range plan for responding to the needs; b) the hiring of an outside consultant to lead the school community in a process for establishing priorities from the data, and goals to respond to the needs identified by the data; or c) the formation of a school-based committee, inclusive of all constituents, to formulate a report detailing priorities and goals (see Appendix A) to be addressed in the long-range strategic plan.

The essential element of this stage is to conclude with a strategic plan of action, based upon the needs analysis and the acceptance of the school community. Indeed, all three activities (coordinated meetings, use of a consultant, and establishing a school-based committee) will ensure that all members of the school community have access to the process of school renewal within the critical area of cultural and racial diversity.

Stage 3: Coordinating the Response: Once the school community has accepted the long-range plan, there is a need for a coordinating committee to over-see the action and implementation of steps necessary to realize the goals articulated in the strategic plan. This committee should be a standing committee within the school structure, and one which has the authority to

make recommendations to the Principal or School Board.

This committee should again consist of all constitutes within the school community, with the chairperson role of this committee being shared by an adult and a student. The adult may be a teacher and/or a parent. This co-chairing function will underscore the importance of the student perspective, and will allow for the identification of critical issues for the work of the committee to be more accessible to student input than otherwise possible.

The critical role of the Principal or school leader in the context of this committee is to ensure that the committee has all the resources it requires to complete its function. These include: a) being the moral leader urging on the work of the committee, b) inviting members of the larger school community not on the committee to attend or assist the work of the community, and c) supplying resources to help the committee reach its goals.

Stage 4: Institutionalizing Response: The critical function of the school leader at every stage is to insure that the school community maintains its commitment to the process of institutional self-reflection. This function is critical in this last stage since the work of the committee must be made part of the on-going commitment for renewal and institutional development. The coordinating committee must seek to address the goals of the strategic plan while at the same time "push the envelope" of such goals. That is, once having accomplished, over

time, some of the key goals, new needs will inevitable arise and must be addressed by this committee.

The school leader must, in conjunction with the committee, see that these new needs are brought to the entire school community, and that they are embraced, followed by the necessary and appropriate steps towards responsive resolution.

This last stage is critical for the validation and legitimization of the coordinating committee. In giving direction to their articulated needs, the school leader allows a voice and avenue for all members of the school community to assert issues of accountability regarding the ideals and practice of the schools' commitment to enhancing racial and cultural understanding. Just as schools re-assess on a periodic basis their curriculum and modes of instruction, the institutionalization of the work of the committee would serve the same purpose. Membership on the coordinating committee could vary on a yearly basis (rotating 25% of the membership terms per year) so as to allow for the continuation of the committee's momentum while at the same time allowing for continuity and a sense of history and purpose to guide the work of the committee.

The Principal or school leader needs to report to the larger school community on the progress made towards the goals articulated in the strategic plan. This "state of the school" presentation should part of the regular feed-back mechanism that the Principal uses to inform the school regarding its own

institutional growth and development. Successes, in all areas (cultural diversity, academic, student activities, etc.) should be highlighted and celebrated. Outstanding needs within critical areas (cultural diversity, academic, student activities, etc.) ought to be identified, and a public commitment articulated for responding to such needs within a timely fashion.

Conclusion

School leadership, as embodied in the role of the Principal, has never more challenging. The needs of our students are extraordinary, and in this age of technology the value diversity available to them is far ranging.

The need for assisting our students in dealing with issues of racism and prejudice has never been greater. There are many factors both within the school and the larger community outside the school which militate against the development of supportive beliefs and attitudes towards embracing racial and cultural diversity. We read, almost on a daily basis, of the failure of our society to live with racial and cultural civility. The school is a powerful factor for re-aligning social forces in the community. The school community ought to be the place where ideals of social, ethnic, and racial integration can be realized. Our efforts in this commitment are critical for the future of our students. The Class of 2009 is depending upon us.

Appendix A

Sample Goals of a Strategic Plan

Goal #1: To develop a statement within the school philosophy or mission statement which specifically describes the school's valuing of cultural and racial differences as a unique resource.

Goal #2: To provide an understanding of prejudice and discrimination and the harm they inflict upon individuals and society.

Goal #3: To recognize our own and others' biases which inhibit intergroup understanding.

Goal #4: To challenge the stereotypes and biases which inhibit intergroup understanding.

Goal #5: To provide techniques for combatting prejudice and discrimination.

Goal #6: To identify factors in the school environment which promote intergroup understanding and student success.

Goal #7: To provide the necessary resources of time and money to allow teachers and students to confront issues of racism and prejudice.

Goal #8: To revise curriculum and materials utilized within the school program to reflect a valuing of diversity.

Goal #9: To assist teachers in developing instructional methods which avoid bias and stereotyping behavior in the classroom.

Goal #10: To assist parents in developing strategies for confronting prejudice at home.

Goal #11: To establish an on-going series of activities for the entire school community which assists all people in dealing with problems and conflicts arising from cultural or racial misunderstanding.

(Goals # 2-6 are taken from A CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE program developed by the A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE INSTITUTE, NYC).

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